



# Alaska State Museum Bulletin 73

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## Concertinas, Curators, Banjos, and Boats: A Visit with Steve Brown

*By Jackie Fernandez, Curator of Collections, Sheldon Jackson Museum*



During the second week of January the Sheldon Jackson Museum was fortunate enough to host former curator of Native American Art at the Seattle Art Museum, and renowned Northwest Coast carver and author Steve Brown. Brown came to Sitka to examine the museum's 19<sup>th</sup> century Northwest Coast souvenir silver collection, identify styles, artists,

and approximate year of make of Sitkans' silver at "An Evening of Silver & Gold, a special Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum event, and to give a lecture at the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum annual meeting.

The Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum is not part of the Alaska State Museum but a separate, independent nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the Sheldon Jackson Museum and its unique Alaska Native ethnographic collection through advocacy, acquisition and educational programming. The Friends' have been instrumental in providing support for educational programs, including the relatively new, very popular At Saxán (Love of All Things) Saturdays family-friendly youth program; the Native Artist Demonstrators Program, the museum's artist-in-residence program; and in adding to the museum's permanent collection, most notably, during the past several years, to the museum's 19<sup>th</sup> century Northwest Coast silver souvenir holdings.



Peter Corey and Steve Brown chat about collections

The Friends, and in particular, the Friends recently retired board member, Peter Corey, and Business Manager, Mary Boose, were instrumental in coordinating Steve Brown's visit. The Friends paid the expenses of his travel and time as a consultant, took the lead on arranging for the Evening of Silver & Gold graciously hosted by the Rain Dance Gallery owned and jointly ran by local artists Tommy Joseph and Kristina Cranston, and coordinated the annual meeting, silent auction to support the Native Artist Demonstrator Program, and Brown's lecture on Kadjisdu.axtc, the man thought to have carved some of the best known masterworks of Tlingit art including house posts in the Whale House at Klukwan and at Chief Shakes' House in Wrangell.

Sheldon Jackson Museum curator, Jacqueline Fernandez, took great pleasure in having the opportunity to discuss souvenir silver, a variety of the museum's Northwest Coast artifacts and artwork, and during coffee breaks, Brown's collection of nine banjos and

two concertinas, and former life living aboard a 44 foot motor sailor moored at a the ship-canal marina in Ballard, Washington. Only two weeks after his visit to Sitka, Brown found himself back in town, this time, fogged in while en route to Juneau from Seattle to attend a meeting. Fernandez picked up Brown from the airport along with his concertina and he answered the following questions:

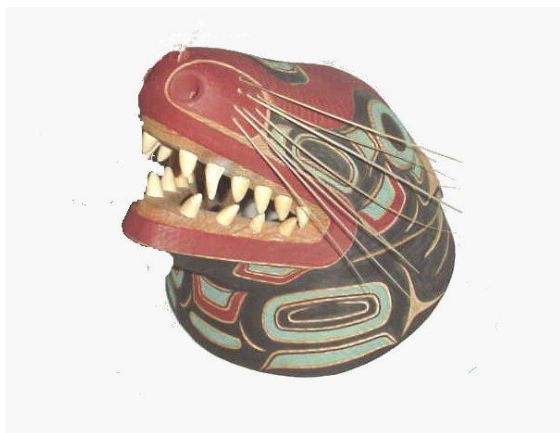
1. **Former SJM curator Peter Corey, a board member of the Friends of the SJM contacted you about coming to Sitka. This had been something he had been interested in doing for a long time. Can you tell me about how you know Peter.**

I met Peter in early 70s. He had invited me to come to the Totem Heritage Center in Ketchikan to teach engraving the year after it opened...I think in 1977. That was my first trip to Alaska teaching here and we've kept in touch ever since. It's also likely that I met Peter before then via Bill Holm at the Burke Museum.

2. **What were your initial thoughts about Peter Corey's proposal? Why did this opportunity appeal to you?**

It was a great excuse to come to Sitka. I wasn't familiar with Northwest Coast silver collection, but I knew there was fairly extensive collection of souvenir silver. I was also interested in the possibility meeting other collectors in the area and felt like I might have something, some information about people's silver that I could share with them.

The first time I had come to work with the Sheldon Jackson Museum, it was actually also something Pete set up – that time to copy three carvings – including reproductions of a wolf mask, a sea lion helmet, and a bear helmet...Those were done during several visits.



I worked for Sitka National Historical Park a number of times, first in 81' when I replicated totem poles, two poles with Nathan Jackson, and reconstructed the head of a

totem pole there and did some repairs...I also made a set of masks that are in the SNHP collection, a set of four masks showing process from roughed out to finished piece.

**3. Can you describe some other similar projects you have done at other museums?**

I don't think I've done anything quite like the attribution project here. I've been to many museums. My favorite is the old Museum of the American Indian storage site in the Bronx (now in Maryland), though I suspect it's different now....Back then, it was all on open shelving and densely packed...It made everything jump...They had boxes stacked on top of each other. It's such a huge collection and only a fraction of it has been published so everything that you found was something totally unfamiliar and great."

**4. Had you seen similar NWC souvenir silver collections and silver jewelry similar to that in the SJM collection before?**

While I've seen similar souvenir spoons in other collections, this was the largest He had largest bunch of NWC souvenir silver I'd seen. [It should be noted that the museum has over one hundred pieces of Northwest Coast souvenir silver, including a variety of bracelets, spoons, pickle forks, butter knives, napkin rings, sugar tongs, and other items made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The silver collection includes pieces made by well-known Tlingit master artists Rudolph Walton, Silver Jim, and even a spoon made by the renowned Haida artist, Charles Edenshaw.]





5. **You yourself are an artist and a well-known carver. How does your eye as an artist assist you in your work in making attributions and identifying important stylistic details? I get the sense that you are able to look at art slightly differently than other scholars who may not practice an art form. Would you agree?**

Yes. I think it's important to have personal experience that informs your eye and your research, not only for silver work here, but replications in Wrangell. I wouldn't feel as comfortable ...reproducing every cut and adze mark on the house posts...you are forced to look at something more closely to reproduce it and as a consequence you see the differences more clearly from one artist's work to another. [Brown was hired along with John Hagen and Wayne Price to replicate poles in the Chief Shakes House in Wrangell 1984, a project of a lifetime. Brown was able to ascertain that houseposts were likely carved by Kadjisdu.axtc, a historic attribution that had hitherto not been made.]

6. **What do you look for when attempting to make attributions?**

In this field because Northwest Coast conventions are all used by a huge range of artists, how each individual artist interprets those shapes is really very individual. Even though the conventions of the art make it seem like you have to do certain things in a certain

way...but in order for it to be a living part of a tradition ...but an individual's ability to interpret certain forms, particularly ovoid shapes and eyes and eyelid shapes – everybody does them, but they all do those things with really subtle, small personal variation and once you get used to seeing them, you can make certain comparisons and say well this looks like the same hand as this...

7. **You mentioned the ways in which pieces tarnish and discolor is one way to get a sense of the percentage of coin silver versus sterling versus copper in a piece. Can you describe what you look for to distinguish between pieces with higher percentages of coin silver compared to sterling?**

Sterling looks whiter or paler...I think it's the copper that accelerates the tarnish....Some of the ones here, I was surprised to see the warmth of the color really seemed to be leaning towards to copper end so may have had a little as 50 or 60% silver ...Coin silver by definition can have as much as %90.....Heating also affects color and look...once you get to a certain temperature, copper flushes to the surface...shows up as kind of a weird shadowy looking surface.....

8. **At this point, SJM has a substantial number of souvenir pieces in the collection, the majority of which are spoons. Are there any kinds of pieces or silver souvenir artists you would recommend the museum pursue?**

The number of bracelets in the collection right now are relatively small and that might be an interesting additional area for collecting....very small number of brooches too....I'm not sure how many other types [types of souvenir silver other than spoons] were made during that period – for example, at the Edenshaw exhibit there were maybe only two napkin rings on exhibit...a few cane ferules....

9. **Were you surprised by any of your findings at the museum?**

I would say I was surprised by how much of this kind of thing there was in Sitka and in general. I just didn't realize how much there was out there to collect...and the number of things to be recently acquired by the Friends or Peter Corey...

10. **Were you surprised by any of your findings during the Silver & Gold event? [At this fundraiser held for the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum, individuals brought their silver and gold pieces to be looked at by Brown. Brown did not make any financial appraisals, but looked at the pieces and tried to identify the period they were made, the style they were done in, and who could have potentially made them.]**

People primarily brought bracelets....It was amazing to see the range of different engravers' work and a fraction of them I was able to identify ...just to see them all and the range was pretty amazing by itself ...You get familiar with the names the researchers

bring up, but then, there were all these others...and who they were and all is unknown...but just the fact that they were all there and that their work survived...

**11. What will you do with your findings from your visit?**

Peter originally wanted me to produce an article that would then be submitted to American Indian Art...so that's a possibility and I'd be willing to do that.

**12. Did your time in Sitka generate any new questions about souvenir silver that you are keen to further investigate?**

I wonder what percentage of souvenir silver made was actually spoons or bracelets...you could look at museum collections, but that doesn't necessarily reflect the percentage of artists working the field and what they actually made...only what museums acquired...

**13. Do you often have the opportunity to visit other museum collections and research their holdings? Is there a particular kind of collection or specific collection or museum you would like to research that you have not yet had the chance to work with?**

There are places I haven't been that I'd like to go to....I'd like to return to NMAI...I'd like to go to the Museum of Civilization in CA...I've been to the museum of American Indian storage, but there is so much there....

**14. What was your favorite piece in the collection that you saw while at SJM and why?**



My favorite object in the museum is the pole from Taquan...to me that is such an outstanding thing...and the fact that it wouldn't have survived at all without having been brought here..... I also liked the elegant small grease dish made of Mountain ash in storage and the variety of canoe models....



- 15. You shared many insights with staff and the Friends of SJM and general public while you were here through your review of the collections, consultations, and even a visit to SNHP to look at a pre-contact grease bowl. Many in Sitka were able to benefit from your visit and learn from you. Did you leave Sitka with any new knowledge or interesting information?**

I don't know if I learned anything new necessarily, but I enjoyed seeing the range of silver here and just developing a greater familiarity with whole collection here...I don't think I'd looked through the drawers in storage in back before.

- 16. What is your next project?**

I'm consulting with the Alaska State Museum headquarters in Juneau about their new installations and exhibitions.

The Sheldon Jackson Museum is grateful to Steve Brown for taking the time to research the silver souvenir collection and all of our Northwest Coast material and to the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum for providing such wonderful support for our activities, educational and public programming, and acquisitions. If you want to learn more about this nonprofit organization or become a member, you can visit [www.friendsofsjm.com](http://www.friendsofsjm.com).

# Ask ASM

*Question:* Is it OK to write on CD/DVD's and what kind of pen or marker should I use?



*ASM:* We hear this question a lot and I have seen it kicked around the MuseumL listserv. Here are a couple of the better responses I have seen there.

From Todd Hopkins, Hillman & Carr Inc.

It's all theoretical, based on the reaction of the alcohol with the label. I've been working with optical for as long as it's been around and have not experienced a failure of any kind other than scratching or incompatible burns.

The "safest" marking method I've heard described is to use a fine point permanent marker on the hub area only. Generally, these systems simply use reference numbers coded to a separate database or simply a separate "label" stored with but not attached to the disc.

Paper labels = very, very bad! Never use ANY kind of adhesive label. That is unequivocal. Your disc will be unusable, sooner rather than later, and the odds of destroying a drive along the way are high.

Recently I've been using the "CD/DVD" markers from Sharpie. These are a bit hard to find and look and behave like regular Sharpies, but are supposed to be safe for optical discs. I like them better than the water based pens I've used previously. I also use only

“printable” stock, even when I don’t intend to use a printer. These discs have an extra print layer that adds protection and is meant to take ink.

From Douglas Nishimura, Image Permanence Institute

Right. No one really knows quite what to expect, but here are some concerns:

1) Softness of the tip. This is why ballpoint pen is not recommended. A small amount of force applied to a very tiny hard tip may cause enough local pressure to produce delamination. This is the spiked heels on a soft floor problem on a smaller scale. Fiber tipped markers were once assumed to be softer and broader, but aren’t necessarily. If I can still do math on a Monday, a quarter pound resting on a 0.7 mm pen tip is equivalent to 419 pounds per square inch and this is why the concern.

2) Solvent/carrier fluid. The upper transparent layer has been polycarbonate (and probably still is.) We know that polycarbonate is sensitive to a pretty broad range of solvents that can cause the polymer to crack, craze, or shatter (depending on what internal stresses have been locked in) and this potential weakness was illustrated in the 1980s with people doing their own artistic additions to polycarbonate bicycle and motorcycle helmets. These head protections then failed to do their jobs and would readily shatter on impact resulting in severe head injuries. In addition to applications of paint and spray paint, felt tipped markers had been used to decorate so there is concern that the pen solvent/carrier fluid may cause the polycarbonate layer to swell, crack, craze, or delaminate if the wrong pen is used. Given the unknown potential for damage, the conservative approach would be to avoid markers (although peeling adhesive labels are known to cause stress delamination so they aren’t necessarily a good alternative.)

## **Shaking the Money Tree**

### **IMLS Receives Increase in Funding**

In January, President Barack Obama signed into law a \$1.1 trillion spending bill to fund the federal government through the end of September, 2014. The legislation includes \$226,860,000 for IMLS which is roughly \$7 million more than the FY13 budget, partially restoring the funding cuts that were part of sequestration. The appropriation is about \$1 million more than the IMLS FY 2014 Request.

The total amount appropriated for libraries, which is through the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), increased from \$175,044,000 in FY 2013 to \$180,909,000 for FY 2014. The total for the Office of Museum Services is \$30.1 million, a \$900,000 increase from the FY 2013, post-sequestration total.

# Spotlight on Grant in Aid

The Seward Museum used a FY2012 Mini-grant to help with their move of collections to their new museum. During the late months of 2012, 5 hard core volunteers diligently worked with Amy Carney, then Seward Community Library Museum Collections Coordinator, to carefully clean, catalog and pack the collection of the Seward Museum in preparation for moving into our new facility. On December 17 the crew of World Wide Movers, who had initially balked when asked to move the museum collection, heaved sighs of relief when they saw the careful and study packing job that had been done. The movers were able to complete what they thought would have been a 3-4 day job in 2 days.



But then the work began again. These same volunteers began the painstaking process of creating a home for Seward's history in the new space. The mini-grant funds were used for a lot of little things that were needed to make the new space a workable museum, especially in preparation for opening on May 11, 2013. There were many trips to the local hardware store for small tools, nails, screws and any other imaginable device that would allow the museum crew to get the exhibits and storage space workable.



Once the space became usable the supply list that was detailed in the original application was reviewed and submitted to purchase storage materials to begin the process of creating secure, archival storage and display spaces for the objects.

## **Alaska Museums in the News**

Wrangell Museum hunts for feet

<http://www.kstk.org/2014/02/04/wrangell-museum-hunts-for-feet/>

Governor's Awards for the Arts and Humanities

[http://juneauempire.com/art/2014-01-30/governors-awards-arts-humanities-be-celebrated-tonight#.UvKaj\\_ldV8E](http://juneauempire.com/art/2014-01-30/governors-awards-arts-humanities-be-celebrated-tonight#.UvKaj_ldV8E)

Artists named for Alaska Public art project

[http://www.newsminer.com/news/local\\_news/artists-named-for-alaska-public-art-project/article\\_65908f3a-8d7d-11e3-88d6-001a4bcf6878.html](http://www.newsminer.com/news/local_news/artists-named-for-alaska-public-art-project/article_65908f3a-8d7d-11e3-88d6-001a4bcf6878.html)

## **Professional Development/Training Opportunities**

Native American Museum Studies Institute:

A Professional Development Opportunity for Tribal Museum Professionals

June 2-6, 2014

To be held at University of California, Berkeley

Goal: to develop the capacity of tribal community members to:

- Conserve and revitalize tribal cultural heritage
- Foster tribal representations and partnerships
- Educate tribal and non-tribal communities through museum development and exhibits

Workshop topics will include:

- Collections Management and Cataloging
- Conservation/Collections Care
- Curation and Exhibit Design
- Educational Programming
- Museum Management
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
- Museum Fundraising
- Tribal Partnerships and Collaborations with Counties, States, and Agencies

Eligibility:

- Priority will be given to those already working or volunteering with a tribe's collection in a museum or in another tribal cultural preservation project
- Those planning a museum or other cultural preservation project may also apply and may be accepted depending upon availability

Expense:

- The training is tuition free to the participants; lunch is provided
- Participants will be responsible for their other meals, lodging, and travel expenses (see website for more details). Partial travel stipends may be available in case of financial need.

Application:

- Review of applications will begin on March 3, 2014.
- Space is limited
- Application form and complete application instructions can be downloaded from our website at <http://crnai.berkeley.edu/> or obtained via fax or mail by calling 510-643-7238.

Sponsors:

-Joseph A. Myers Center for Research on Native American Issues, UC Berkeley

-California Indian Museum and Cultural Center

-Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, UC Berkeley

Co-Sponsors:

C.N. Gorman Museum, UC Davis

Center for Digital Archaeology, UC Berkeley

For more information, call Deborah Lustig at 510-643-7238 or email [namsiucb@gmail.com](mailto:namsiucb@gmail.com)

## Conferences

### Poles, Posts and Canoes: the Preservation, Conservation and Continuation of Native American Monumental Wood Carving

July 21st - 22nd, 2014, Tulalip, Washington

The call for papers has been extended to February 28th, 2014. We still have a few spaces for presentations, especially those angled towards general collections management, display and use of these objects in native and non-native managed museums, and the use in a museum setting of traditional means of maintenance. For full details of proposal requirements, as well as registration information for both the symposium and the totem pole maintenance workshop that follows on July 23rd - 25th July, please visit <http://www.hibulbculturalcenter.org/Events/Symposium/>

## International Foundation for Cultural Property Protection

We are pleased to announce that this year's conference will be held in our home state of Colorado. We're planning 2 days of general sessions, certification courses, breakout sessions, exhibits, and museum excursions in downtown Denver, followed by 2 days of special sessions, networking, and historic excursions in the Colorado mountains.

The conference is tentatively scheduled for August 9-14:

- Saturday and Sunday pre-conference cultural activities and welcome reception

- Monday and Tuesday educational sessions, exhibits, and nighttime activities in downtown Denver
- Wednesday and Thursday seminars and activities in the Rocky Mountains

Significant lodging discounts will be available, and package deals for all conference offerings. We plan to confirm dates within a week, and have registration available in mid-February. Stay tuned for web site updates and email announcements. <http://ifcpp.org/>

## Professional Time Wasting on the Web

On the ground: A tale of two museums

The power and limits of what money and space can do for teaching science to the public

<http://scienceline.org/2014/01/on-the-ground-a-tale-of-two-museums/>

Poor tradeoffs, the Randall College controversy

<http://www.artsjournal.com/realcleararts/2014/02/poor-trade-off-bellows-to-london-but-one-bright-side.html>

Giant sinkhole swallows cars at Corvette Museum

<http://corvettemuseum.org/enews/backups/media/sinkhole.htm>

The unsettling state of state historical societies

<http://engagingplaces.net/2014/02/11/unsettling-state-of-state-historical-societies/>

Mold mars 600,000 MU volumes stored at off-campus facility

[http://www.columbiatribune.com/news/education/mold-mars-mu-volumes-stored-at-off-campus-facility/article\\_cac3a588-884e-11e3-a89a-10604b9f1ff4.html](http://www.columbiatribune.com/news/education/mold-mars-mu-volumes-stored-at-off-campus-facility/article_cac3a588-884e-11e3-a89a-10604b9f1ff4.html)

What not to do with kids at a museum

<http://hyperallergic.com/105448/what-not-to-do-with-kids-in-a-museum/>